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The Woman in Blue

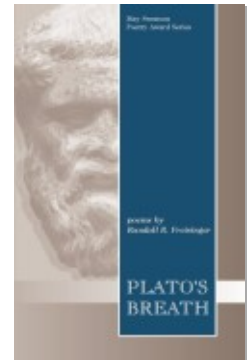
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THE WOMAN IN BLUE

I yell: *Watch this!* to my wife and children.
It's summer, we have hiked half way up the ski hill,
and with a boy's impish reflex I release
the discarded tire I have righted, instantly pleased
how it keeps its balance over bumps, gathering speed.
An instant more, and it's past retrieving. I see
beyond impulse to consequence, the way it is with words
you would sometimes take back if only you could.

Below, a road thick with traffic, the lodge windows'
great spans of glass, a house, an old woman
all in blue working her garden moments ago, but now
waving wildly up at me, or the tire, or both.

Watching that tire, I am a mix, panicked, transfixed,
the way divinity must feel, or so I want
to believe, when one of its bolts of lightning forks
eenie meenie mynie mo toward a field green and full

of Little Leaguers. Later, after the tire has bounced
harmlessly off the side of the lodge, after the woman
in blue has rebuked me for another tire that once crashed
through her living room window, exploding her TV
into flame, after a stiff drink to ease my nerves, I recall
a distant summer morning. I had taken my place
with a friend at a local dairy behind a high pile of slush
dumped by milk trucks after their morning runs. Our ammo

pile of snowballs waited for the yellow Troost trolley
to waddle slowly to its corner stop and idle
like a huge sitting duck. My friend, later to sign
for big bucks with the Cardinals and known
already across the city for his high vicious fast one,
had worked his first throw into a delicious
seamless ball of ice, which left his hand as soon
as the trolley appeared, a white streak of speed

hissing in the summer heat, no target but the mind's home plate. I can still see the open window, the man, someone perhaps like my father, bound for work in town and reading, his glasses going crazy into the air when the icy pitch connected, denial forming on my lips even as my friend and I scrambled up the alley. The same way it formed with the tire, only now there is no hope of escape:

conscience, wife, children, the false frontage of middle age. In truth, now I am more like that man with glasses, a tireless victim of one childish sniping or another. I know how he must have picked up the broken spectacles, stared at the incongruity of snow on his newspapered lap, followed their backs as those two boys scurried madly away, his heart diastolic with murder. I know his legs must have felt

heavy as he clambered off the trolley to chase what he knew he had no hope of catching, anger and fear and death all strong in his mouth like a rancid bouillabaisse. I looked back only once to see him stopped and out of breath beneath the silent marquee of the local theater, his arms pumping wildly, just like that woman in blue, that same urgent semaphoric warning that baffles less and less.